

## RX for Stress!

CCAPS Newsletter  
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What counseling center *isn't* being faced with increasing student demand and limited resources? In an effort to better meet the needs for clinical and outreach services while more efficiently using staff resources, the idea for a highly interactive website was conceived about five years

ago at The University of Texas Counseling and Mental Health Center and was brought to final fruition in the fall, 2009.

The topic we chose for such a website was stress management---by far our most commonly requested outreach workshop and an issue that clinicians endorsed as being intertwined with most student counseling concerns. Our research revealed that there were few if any existing websites which were tailored for college students and also met our criteria for high levels of interactivity around this topic.

Once our focus was decided, we developed an outline of the site which was folded into a program proposal for our center director who subsequently approved our idea and budget. We named the site "Stress Recess" to create a playful, positive invitation to our student

audience. Fortunately, we had a staff social worker, Allen Lambert, with previous filmmaking experience. Allen played a key role in the development of the site material and the actual production scripting, videotaping, editing and sound effects. We also contracted with our university ITS department to create the animation and actual site programming.



The site was developed using the scientist practitioner model, incorporating the Prochaska and DiClemente stages of change model and other research about stress, including cognitive behavioral approaches to stress management. Students enter the website either through the counseling center website <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/> or directly through

 What is this?

<http://cmhc.utexas.edu/stressrecess/index.html>. The homepage is complete with an airplane that flies across the screen with a “Need Refreshment?” banner across a beach scene filled with fun clickable objects related to stress. On the left sidebar, students can click on basic questions about stress and the website for immediate brief answers. These sidebar questions include: “Why do I feel this way?”, “What can I do right now that will help?”, “What can I do differently in the future?”, “I need to talk to someone right now”, “What’s new?” and “Links to more information”.

At the top of the page, students can choose to either follow a guided program, based on a stages of change quiz or explore the website on their own. A predominant theme and icon that is repeated throughout the website is “think small”, i.e., stressing the importance of taking realistic “baby steps” in the change process. FAQ’s are also distributed throughout the website sections, too. In addition, throughout most sections there are brief sections with concise relevant information/text. Finally, frequent opportunities are provided for students to give feedback about the website. Their feedback is sent to a counseling center staff person; several positive changes have already been made to the website based on feedback comments.

The website is divided into 3 levels: beginner, intermediate and advanced. The beginner level is geared towards students who may not have a clear understanding about stress and how it impacts their lives. These students are beginning their journey towards a more balanced, healthy way of life. The intermediate level is designed for students who already have this initial understanding and want to refine how they’re handling stress and/or learn new ways, i.e., “fine tuning” their stress management skills. The advanced level provides more links to students for other resources on campus as well as bibliotherapy references.

The following is a brief description of each of the modules in the three levels:

- **What is Stress?** A definition and description of stress and eustress; symptoms of stress.
- **What do you eat?** A discussion of what foods affect stress as well as other things that we expose ourselves to that affect stress, e.g., people we associate with, media and activities.
- **Fight or Flight:** 1) An **animated movie** that describes the fight or flight response, including the physiological mechanisms, and how this can manifest in a student’s world 2) A **video game** designed to help students build on their physiological understanding and provide practice with manipulating the body’s “machinery” in order to cope with stress in a healthy way.
- **Stress’ Effects on the Body:** 1) 2 graphic student images that students can “roll over” the **body parts** to find out about stress at those places 2) A **2-minute “body scan”** with a built-in timer and graphic body that students can “color in” their stress before and after thinking stressful thoughts.
- **Perfectionism:** 1) An **animated movie** describing the vicious cycle of perfectionism 2) An **animated movie** describing the cycle of healthy striving 3) A **puzzle exercise** that illustrates the difference between realistic goals and perfectionistic goals.
- **Stress Cycles:** 1) An **animated movie** describing the negative stress cycle 2) an **animated movie** describing the positive stress cycle and 3) **pdf worksheets** for the negative and positive stress cycles to identify unhealthy patterns and practice new ones.
- **Training: Cognitive Distortions:** 1) A **scenario-based quiz** to practice identifying types of cognitive distortions with a **2-minute buzzer** to solicit automatic thoughts.
- **The Anxiety Spiral:** A **video movie game** that prompts students to

choose various options to interrupt anxious thinking. The objective is to help students realize that it is better to stop the anxiety spiral before it grows.

- **Priority Pie:** 1) **A clickable “pie” for 4 stereotypical students** (athlete, over achiever, party animal and studious) shows how these students might spend their time in 9 categories over a typical 24 hour period. 2) **A downloadable priority pie chart** that students can use to track their own time use to help them prioritize their resources.
- **Training: Diaphragmatic Breathing: A video demonstration.**
- **Training: Progressive Muscle Relaxation: A video demonstration.**
- **Training: Yoga: A 1.5 hour video demonstration of basic yoga techniques.**

In summary, the University of Texas at Austin Counseling and Mental Health Center hopes that Stress Recess will not only be of great value to our students but that other universities will also find it helpful and link to it from their counseling center websites. Questions about this website should be directed to Dr. Jane Morgan Bost, Associate Director, [via email](#).

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